



# FEMA

# Fact Sheet

## Federal Insurance and Mitigation Administration

### Community Safe Rooms

*Every year, tornadoes, hurricanes, and other extreme windstorms cause numerous fatalities and injuries, and cost millions of dollars worth of property damage throughout the United States. Most businesses and public buildings, even new ones constructed according to current building codes, do not provide adequate protection for occupants seeking refuge from these events.*

*A Community Safe Room can provide “near-absolute protection” for many community members, when it is constructed in accordance with FEMA criteria. A growing number of these Safe Rooms have already saved lives in actual events.*



Seneca Intermediate School multi-purpose Community Safe Room, Seneca, MO.

### What is a Safe Room?

A Safe Room is a room or structure specifically designed and constructed to resist wind pressures and wind-borne debris impacts during an extreme-wind event, like tornadoes and hurricanes, for the purpose of providing life-safety protection.

The criteria for a community Safe Room is contained in [FEMA 361, Design and Construction Guidance for Community Safe Rooms, \(2008\).](#)

### Safe Rooms vs. Storm Shelters

Many National, State, and local community protection initiatives have resulted in the designation of some structures as community storm shelters. While these structures may provide some protection and may meet the International Code Council® (ICC) criteria for the design and construction of storm shelters, only a structure designed and constructed in accordance with the guidance contained in FEMA 361, is a Safe Room.

### Does Every Community Need a Safe Room?

The decision to build a Community Safe Room can be based on a single factor or a collection of factors. Single factors are often related to the potential for loss of life or injury (e.g., officials at a hospital that cannot move patients in an intensive care unit, officials at a school that takes care of a large number of children, etc.). The decision should be based on a thorough risk assessment that considers type of hazard, probability of event, occurrence and severity of event, and the vulnerability of community buildings and the size of the population at risk.

FEMA 361 contains guidance on conducting risk assessments and provides a decision-making process that can help community officials and residents determine their need for a Community Safe Room.

### Funding for Community Safe Rooms

Federal programs that provide funds for safe room construction include U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds, Federal Housing Administration (FHA) mortgage insured financing, and the FEMA Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP), and the Pre-Disaster Mitigation (PDM) grant program.

Many states have developed initiatives for the construction of residential, public, and private safe rooms, including safe rooms in hospitals, emergency operations centers, first-responder facilities, schools, day care centers, manufactured home parks, private residences, community centers, senior centers, and campgrounds.

For more information about Safe Room funding and initiatives, visit this link: [http://www.fema.gov/plan/prevent/saferoom/sr\\_initi.shtm](http://www.fema.gov/plan/prevent/saferoom/sr_initi.shtm)

## Role of the State Hazard Mitigation Officer (SHMO)

Planning and funding a Community Safe Room can be a challenging task, but help is available. State Hazard Mitigation Officers or SHMOs are experts in this field. They can help communities integrate Safe Rooms into local hazard mitigation plans and assist with the development of grant applications.

Hazard Mitigation Assistance (HMA) grant funding for Safe Rooms is provided to eligible States, Tribes and Territories that, in turn, provide the funding to local governments. Assistance with this process can be obtained by contacting the SHMO, who can provide detailed information on grant opportunities, application periods and eligibility requirements.

## The Multi-Purpose Safe Room

Community Safe Rooms can also be designed for multiple purposes, including community centers for manufactured home parks and gymnasiums, cafeterias or music rooms in public schools.

## Safe Rooms and Flooding Hazards

Safe rooms should not be constructed where flood waters have the potential to endanger occupants within the safe room. Safe rooms in areas where flooding may occur during hurricanes should not be occupied during a hurricane. However, occupying such a safe room during a tornado may be acceptable if the safe room will not be flooded by rains associated with other storm and tornado events.

## FEMA Best Practice

Following tornado damage in previous years, the town of Leesburg, AL, committed to building its own Safe Room, becoming the first town in Cherokee County, AL to receive federal funds to build a Community Safe Room, in 2008.

Leesburg's dual purpose Safe Room opened on April 21, 2011, immediately proving its critical value, as storms hit the area less than a week later, during the devastating tornado outbreak that struck much of the Southeast U.S. that month.

Designed in accordance with FEMA 361, the 2,500 square-foot safe room is reinforced to withstand winds of 250 miles per hour, provided a vital community refuge.



Exterior view of Cherokee County's Community Safe Room

Local building officials or local National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) representative can determine if a proposed Community Safe Room would be susceptible to local, riverine, or coastal flooding.

## Useful Links and Resources

FEMA Safe Room Hotline: 1-866-222-3580  
Email: [Saferoom@dhs.gov](mailto:Saferoom@dhs.gov)

State Hazard Mitigation Officers  
<http://www.fema.gov/about/contact/shmo.shtm>

For more information on FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Assistance (HMA) policy on the use of HMGP and PDM funds for Safe Rooms, visit:  
<http://www.fema.gov/library/viewRecord.do?id=3634>

## Useful Links and Resources (Continued)

Design and Construction Guidance for Community Safe Rooms (FEMA 361), August 2008, 2nd Edition

<http://www.fema.gov/library/viewRecord.do?id=1657>

Tornado Protection: Selecting Refuge Areas in Buildings (FEMA P-431), FEMA, October 2009, 2nd Edition

<http://www.fema.gov/library/viewRecord.do?id=1563>

National Storm Shelter Association (NSSA);

<http://www.NSSA.cc>

ICC/NSSA Standard for the Design and Construction of Storm Shelters, International Code Council and the National Storm Shelter Association (ICC-500), June 2008

[http://www.iccsafe.org/Store/Pages/Product.aspx?id=8850P08\\_PD-X-SS-P-2008-000001#longdesc](http://www.iccsafe.org/Store/Pages/Product.aspx?id=8850P08_PD-X-SS-P-2008-000001#longdesc)

Additional information from FEMA Building Science can be found at <http://www.fema.gov/rebuild/buildingscience> and <http://www.fema.gov/plan/prevent/saferoom>

Safe Room information for Families, Builders, Employers and First Responders:

<http://highwindsaferooms.org/>